

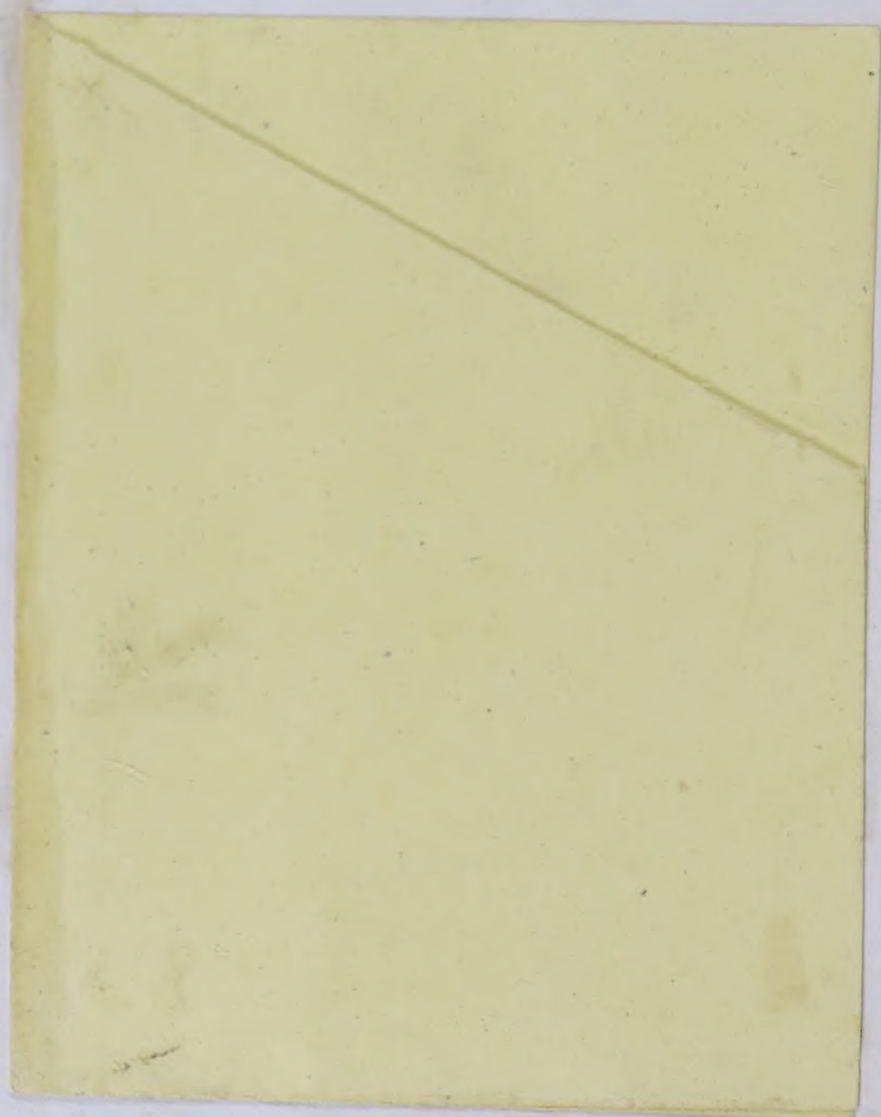
Series: Women's Participation in Development

How To Conduct Participatory Research Among Women?



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How To Conduct Participatory Research Among Women?

by

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The case studies mentioned here are
real field experiences, though real
names have been withheld to maintain
confidentiality.



UNICEF Development of Women and
Children in Rural Areas

and



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INTRODUCTION

As a field worker, what do you think when you read the title of this bulletin? Do you think: "What have I got to do with research? I am a simple field worker. I have to work according to my job. The work of helping poor women to improve their situation **does**, for sure, entail research. And though it does, I am certainly not competent to do any research. Other experts can be invited to tell us what they learn from their research."

Well, if you did think something similar to the reaction given above, it is not surprising. Most of us have been conditioned to believe that research is something that is done by experts, in universities and colleges and laboratories. It is something that produces big books and learned speeches. This belief makes us afraid of research and anything associated with it. This is the mystification of research.

If you ask yourself why research is carried out, you will perhaps say that research is necessary for knowledge. And knowledge is needed by all of us, specially by those of us who are poor and weak, so that we can improve our situation.

All of us, even the poor and the weak, need research, in some way or the other. We believe that ordinary people, including poor women, already do some research, and can be encouraged to do more research in order to survive and improve their lot. This is Participatory Research.

The purpose of this bulletin is to help you understand more about Participatory Research and how you can utilise it in the course of your work.



WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH?

1. Participatory Research is a systematic process which involves people in the analysis of their own situation. Every individual carries out some research every day.

2. Participatory Research gives women the skills and confidence to understand their own situation. Surveys made by experts make women dependent and prevent them from improving their present condition.

3. Most women's programmes are based on the analysis made by outside experts who have a different perception of poor women. Frequently, they create programmes on the basis of their analysis, which do not fulfil women's real needs.

4. The main limitation of this type of programme is that once it fails, the experts blame the poor women instead of their wrong perceptions.



DON'T ASSUME, CONSULT WOMEN

In a certain district, an agency wanted to implement a rural development programme for tribals, in particular focusing on the needs of women and children. To plan the programme, the agency sent a team of experts to do the initial survey.

One of the major findings of the survey was that most women were not employed in any productive economic activity. One potentially good area for such activity appeared to be dairying.

The agency felt that breeding of good cows and production of milk would not only give extra nutrition to the children and other members of the family, but also produce additional income.

A dairy farm was set up and extension workers went to the villages to talk to women to convince them about the need for dairying. In most cases, the extension workers were able to persuade two or three women to attend training camps for dairying organised at the farm. Then the agency worked out an arrangement with the local lead bank to provide subsidised loans to tribal women who wanted to buy good cows for dairying. When this scheme was announced, hardly any women came forward to buy the cows.

When this situation continued for about a year, the agency became very concerned about the failure of its programme. So, it made great efforts to find out why the women did not come forward to buy cows with subsidised loans.

After great difficulty, they learnt that milk was considered some form of pus (bad secretion) among tribals and they preferred to keep away from it. The agency also learnt gradually that the tribal women were productively engaged, though not in cash economy, in a variety of activities: household work, bringing firewood, fetching drinking water, etc.

- *Why did this programme fail?*
- *What could you have done differently?*





CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

BREAKING THE ROUTINE

In a certain tribal area, women had been working as agricultural labourers with very low wages. Over a period of time, a local organisation had developed which fought for minimum wages for men and women. In the course of their getting together, it was decided to hold a 'shibir' (camp) for women.

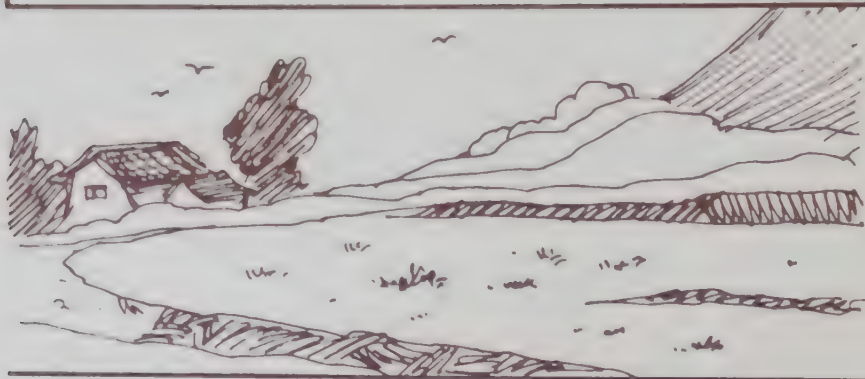
In the camp, about 25 women came together from six different villages. The first activity in the camp was self-introduction. Each woman stood up and gave her name, the name of her village and spoke about her family, etc. This act of introduction, a very small act in itself, had a tremendous effect on their confidence. It also helped them to see the similarities in their situations.

As introductions ended, women started talking about their problems—of poverty, wife-beating, alcoholism etc. At the end of a two-hour discussion on wife-beating, it became apparent to the women that the main cause of this was the incidence of alcoholism among their men. They began to understand that non-tribals were making money by brewing and selling liquor in their villages. And alcoholism also drained their otherwise meagre family incomes.

Having reached this understanding, some women asked in the camp: "What are we going to do about it?" Several ideas were generated, many were discarded after evaluating their workability. Then all the women agreed that the direct method of confronting the brewer in the village where the camp was being held, should be tried out.

So they all went as a group to the brewer and threatened to expose his illicit brewing if he did not stop forthwith. Sensing a collective action, the brewer promised to stop.

In the course of this action, the women met the local Police Patel and started interrogating him. They asked him why he had not reported and stopped the illicit brewing earlier. They questioned him about his duties, source of his income, the basis of his salary from the government, etc. The questioning led them to understand how the government got money through indirect (and direct) taxes (for example, taxes on cloth, match boxes, etc.) which were paid by ordinary people like them.



Thus one can see that this camp became a research event. Women came together, analysed their situation collectively, developed an understanding of connections between wife-beating, illicit brewing of liquor and continued deprivation, and took concrete action to change that situation. The process of collective and systematic analysis and reflection was set in motion through the camp. Participatory Research was characterised by the following:

- An activity carried out by a group of women to understand **their own** situation. It was carried out for their own benefit. It arose because some women felt the need to understand some aspects of their situation.
- A **collective** effort to solve a problem. It was carried out to understand a certain aspect of their own reality in a collective manner. The group of women had ownership over the investigation process and the knowledge so generated.
- An analysis that led to **action** by the group of women. It was not carried out just to enhance understanding, but also to take some concrete actions. This process of analysis and reflection helped them to make decisions collectively and to take action towards changing an aspect of their situation.
- A group of poor rural women beginning to understand the nature of their poverty and its underlying causes. This allowed them to make **connections** between their personal reality and the larger social reality. It facilitated awareness-raising about the connections between micro aspects of their life and the larger macro reality.



PROCESS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

A series of simple steps are taken in conducting Participatory Research. They are as follows:

1. What is the problem?

A group of women first agree on a common statement of a problem. Some common problems, for example, are wife-beating, low income, indebtedness, sickness of children, etc. The problem should be stated clearly and concretely.

2. Do we need a solution?

The group of women should express interest in solving the problem. Sometimes, problems are identified merely because someone asked them about their problems. This step should ensure that there is a willingness to understand the problem in its entirety and its underlying causes, as well as an attempt to solve it. Questions like "Why do we want to solve the problem?", "How will we benefit if the problem is solved?", may help in clarifying this.

3. What do we know about the problem?

The group of women record all that they already know about the problem. For example, if the problem is sickness of children, then they can each describe the sickness, its type, intensity and duration in the case of their own children. This helps in focusing on the problem in a concrete way.

4. What else do we need to know about the problem?

Having articulated and recorded what they already know about the problem, they can then begin to identify what else they need to know about the problem. For example, how widespread is the problem? Why does it occur in this form? Continuing with the example of sickness of children, the group may need to know how many children in the hamlet (or the village) are affected by those diseases, why the sickness occurs, what are the ways to prevent and cure the sickness, etc.

5. How are we going to collect additional information?

This is the step of data-collection. The group needs to decide how to get the information, whose assistance is needed, when they will get the information, and who in the group will do what.

6. What do we learn from this information?

Having obtained the information, the group collectively analyzes that information. It is important that analysis and reflection is undertaken as a collective process, not to be done by one person alone. This will help the group understand the causes of the problem and provide clues for possible solutions.

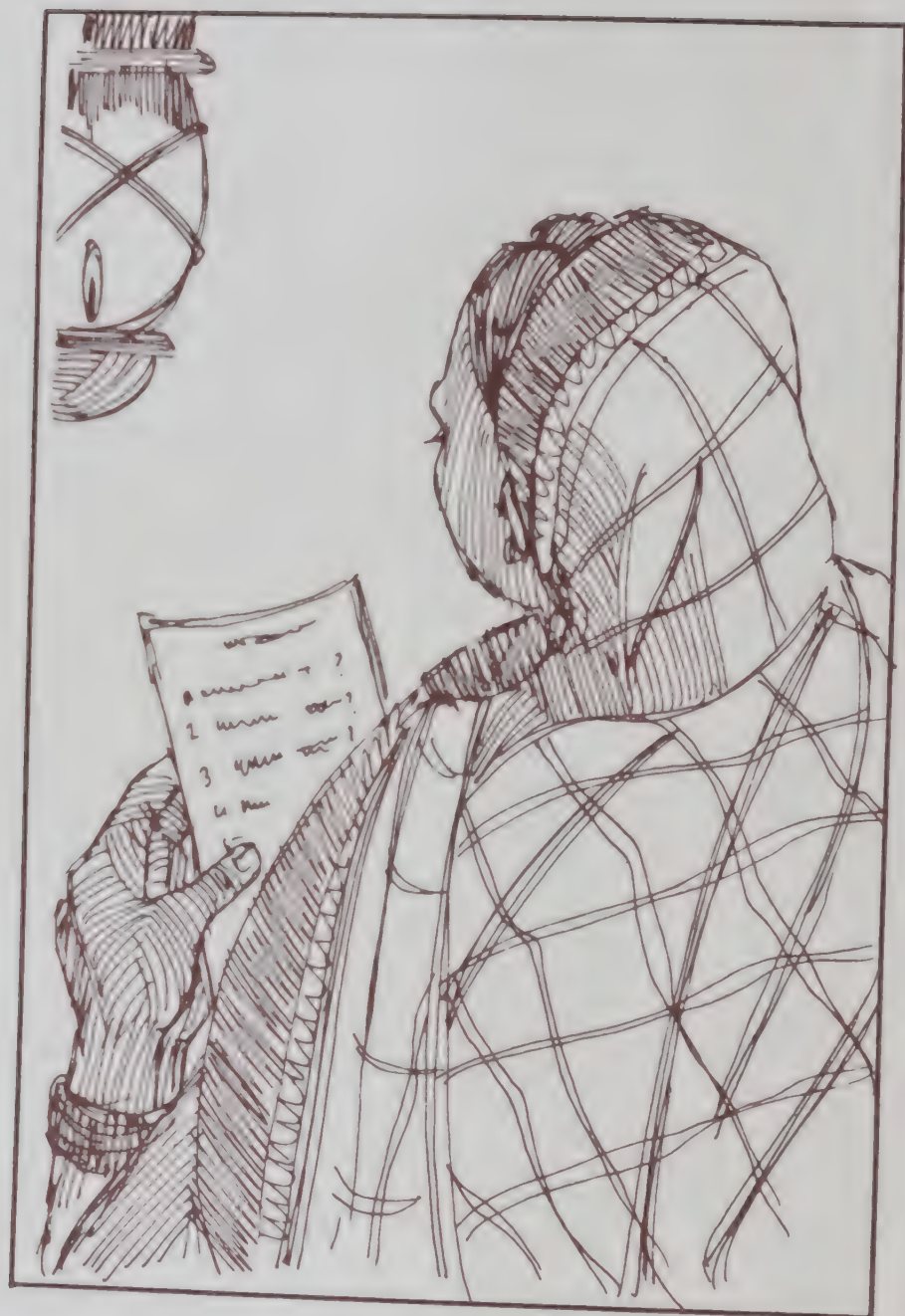
7. What solutions are possible? What actions are needed?

Various solutions to the problem are generated, their workability is assessed and the choice of solution is made. Then, in order to solve the problem, what actions are to be taken by whom, when, where, and how, are also discussed and decided. Then these actions are taken.

8. What do we learn from these actions?

In this step, the impact of the actions taken is systematically assessed to see if the problem is fully or partially solved. The actions taken may sometimes create new problems. So, this step is once again the beginning of another process of Participatory Research. Thus, Participatory Research becomes an ongoing process in the group, as part of its normal activity and not something separate.





METHODS IN PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

A variety of methods can be used to carry out Participatory Research among women. Some of those methods are as follows:

1. Self-Survey

A common method of data-collection is to carry out a small survey. A group of women can investigate a particular problem by using a questionnaire to know the opinions of a large number of women. The questionnaire should be simple and should have only a few (8-10) questions. Each question should also be simple and straightforward. Care should be taken to keep the questions short and clear. A good questionnaire should seem like an easy conversation. The information thus obtained can then be analysed by aggregating the responses.



EXPLODING THE MYTH

In a tribal, hilly area, several families had become indebted to outside moneylenders and liquor-merchants. Over the years, they had mortgaged their land, trees and cattle to the moneylenders. A group of tribal men and women from a few villages decided to redeem their mortgages following the government's announcement to abolish rural indebtedness.

In order to do so, they needed concrete information about the extent of their mortgages. So this group of tribals decided to conduct a survey. Over a two-month period, they collected detailed information from all the families in 97 villages of the area. They obtained information about the amount of loan taken, repayments made, if any, the type of mortgage (land, trees, cattle), to whom this was mortgaged, etc.

Then they analysed, for each case, whether the mortgagee had fully or partially repaid the initial loans. They then organised this analysis for each moneylender separately. Having done so, they invited the moneylender and the concerned families to a public meeting and settled the matter. Though there was resistance from the moneylenders, all property was redeemed through collective action. The group which took initiative in the survey comprised of only one literate person.

2. Group Discussions

A small number of women (8-25) come together to share experiences and decide on action through group discussion. It is one of the most popular and easy methods and has the advantage of combining data-collection and analysis, and action-planning. In a group discussion contradictory opinions and points of view of different women can be openly discussed and analysed. This facilitates a deeper analysis of the problem as well.

This method can be easily used in combination with other methods. However, the important thing is to ensure a comfortable atmosphere in the group so that all can participate actively and listen to each other. If women perceive that they are not listened to, they may feel that their problems are not important. If there are a large number of women in the group, they can be easily divided into smaller sub-groups to facilitate free and easy discussion.



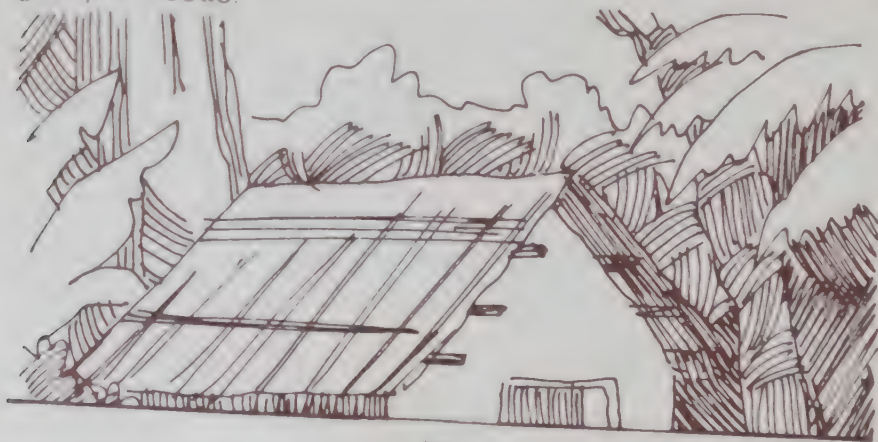
3. Camp

A camp or shibir or workshop or training programme can be used as an intensive event to carry out Participatory Research. It is generally organised over a day or two, with common living and eating arrangements. Generally women from different villages, over long distances, come together.

Organised in an informal and free atmosphere, camps serve an educational purpose as well. These camps also provide an opportunity for reflection by the participants away from their daily pressures, and facilitate development of a feeling of solidarity among them. Depending upon the facilities available, 50 to 100 women can participate in one camp.

4. Research Team

Sometimes the problem that the group chooses to study may involve some technical expertise. In these situations, members of the group join hands with outside experts in studying the problem and finding appropriate solutions. The experts bring in their expertise in the service of the group's needs.



CONTROLLING EXPERTISE

A group of marginal farmer families in two villages had been considering ways to solve the problem of excessive deforestation and drying up of ponds and wells in their area. They needed to understand this problem in its various dimensions. So they approached a local voluntary agency for assistance. The agency requested assistance from Drought Prone Area Programme staff (a programme of the government to alleviate conditions of drought).

A two-person expert team was sent to the village. The team discussed the problem with a small group of villagers and agreed to carry out one survey of ground water resources and another of deforestation. In the latter, old villagers significantly contributed their knowledge of trees and forests from their experiences over the years.

After the surveys were conducted, the experts presented their analyses and a range of solutions to the villagers. These solutions consisted of building several small dams and storage places and a choice of tree varieties for reforestation. The villagers then made a choice based on their preferences and resources.



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5. Fact-Finding Visit

Sometimes it is useful for a group interested in solving a problem to visit another area where a similar problem has been solved. The tour to another village can become an investigative visit to find out how other similar women went about solving a similar problem. It helps the group to feel confident as well.

Sometimes, visits can be organised to government offices to find out about various programmes and their implementation. The visit, however, needs to be carefully planned to make best use of the time spent there. The group should be willing to engage in continuous reflection, both during and after the visit. After the visit, these findings and reflections can be shared with others.

6. Audio-Visual Production

Sometimes the group wanting to engage in Participatory Research may find itself uncomfortable with written methods. This is particularly true with poor women, most of whom are illiterate. In such circumstances, simple audio-visual methods can be used to facilitate analysis and reflection. A group discussion or individual interview can be taped and then replayed for analysis.

Women can be encouraged to draw their perceptions of the problem on a blackboard, paper or cloth. Black and white photographs have been effectively used to promote reflection and analysis. Cuttings from old magazines and other materials can be used to prepare a collage to express their perceptions of a problem.

These methods can be effectively used to stimulate analysis and reflection and can be easily combined with other methods.

7. Popular Theatre

As an extension of audio-visual production, other folk media can also be used. Songs, dances and puppetry are examples of the same. In some places, simply produced dramas have been used as an effective method of Participatory Research.

The group members identify a problem and enact a skit or play on it in the presence of others. It is then discussed with the audience to stimulate further analysis, reflection and action.



ENACTING LIFE

Four scheduled caste women in an urban slum were interested in solving the problems of women like themselves. Two of them enjoyed acting. So they decided to analyse women's problems through drama. They first shared their own experiences as women. Through this they identified several problems: wife-beating, extra-marital relationship, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law fights, etc.

On the basis of their personal experiences, they prepared short (20/30-minutes) scripts. They each took a role and put up the play in the presence of a few (initially 5, later 20) slum women. After the play was over, a discussion among actors and audience occurred where similar and different experiences were shared. This led to a revision and enriching of the script which was again enacted.

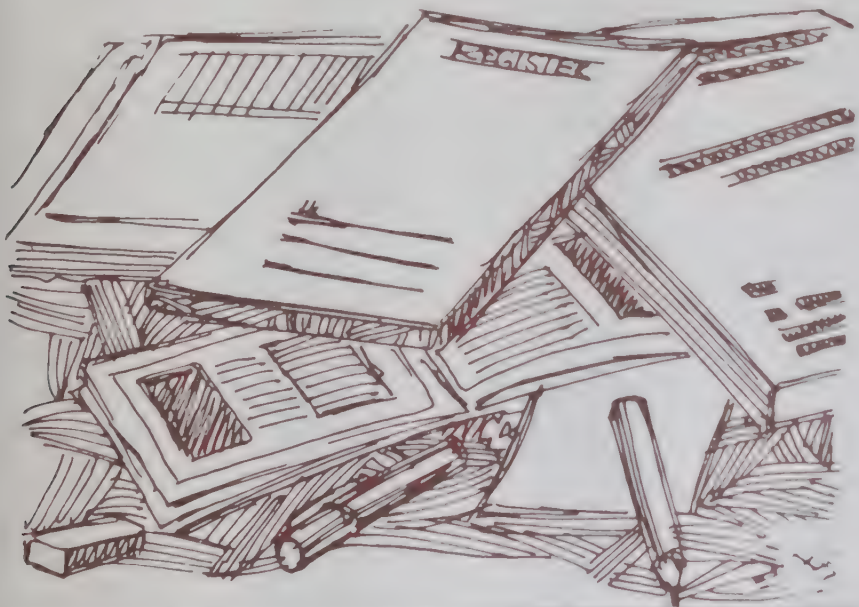
The plays became dynamic analysis of a specific women's problem and also contributed to mobilising slum women to take action to solve the problem. An interesting aspect was that the plays generated sensitive, personal information about such difficult issues as extra-marital relations (which could not have been analysed through a formal method, like survey).

8. Documents

Analysis of existing documents is another method that can be used. Many reports, papers, documents, registers, diaries and books may contain useful information about a particular problem.

One limitation is that it is sometimes difficult to locate and obtain the documents. But they do have factual information that can be used. Another limitation with documents is that they require literacy skills to analyse them. However, they can be used along with other methods.

It is important to recognise that these methods represent the range of ways in which Participatory Research can be conducted. They can also be used in combination, and new methods can also be invented based on a given situation.



ROLE OF THE FIELD WORKER

It may appear that an outside field worker has no role in Participatory Research that is being conducted by a group of women themselves. This is not correct. The field worker has the following roles:

1. The field worker should see Participatory Research as a contribution to her efforts to organise and strengthen women's groups. Viewed in this way, she is also a participant in the process of Participatory Research carried out by a group of women.
2. The field worker can utilise Participatory Research as a methodology to understand women's point of view. This way she can continuously assess her own assumptions vis-a-vis that of the women.
3. An important role of the field worker is to initially ensure that the group of women follow the steps of Participatory Research systematically. Her role will be critical in step two where the group needs to make sure that it is genuinely interested.
4. The field worker, as an outsider, brings a fresh perspective to the group. She should share her own perspective and analysis with the group without imposing it on them. This will help the group get an alternative perspective and thus deepen their analysis.
5. Posing critical questions is another role for the field worker. Sometimes when poor women are asked why

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they are poor, they give a simplistic answer that they are poor because they are illiterate, stupid and ignorant. She should not accept such superficial answers but question them further to develop a deeper understanding of their poverty.

6. The field worker's knowledge and skills will be useful to the group in the process of Participatory Research. However, she should consciously attempt to transfer this knowledge and skills to the group members over a period of time.

7. In the course of Participatory Research, when the group needs the expertise not available within the group, the field worker can help the group in identifying and obtaining that expertise from outside. She should carefully mediate between the group and external experts so that the latter do not dominate the group.

8. Finally, the field worker needs to play a promotional role in encouraging the group to use systematic reflection and analysis as an ongoing part of its activities.



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HYGIENE

It's what you don't see
that does the most harm.



Here are some facts that parents must remember:

Most parents know the importance of hygiene. But often a busy mother may overlook some details of cleanliness.

Can any mother take this risk? The hidden dangers—germs that you cannot see—can lead to illnesses in your family. A baby is more likely to fall ill. If you have a baby, you need to be extra careful about keeping your home and surroundings clean.

- Germs breed in dirt and contaminated water, causing diarrhoea and spreading diseases like cholera, dysentery and gastro-enteritis. Drinking water must be boiled, cooled and strained through a clean cloth. Store this water in a clean, covered container.
- Give your baby fresh food. Wash your hands before you cook the meal or feed your baby.
- Keep utensils clean. Wash them before and after use and rinse under running water.
- All clothes, including undergarments and bed linen, must be clean and fresh.

Let your baby grow in a home free from dirt and disease. Every baby has the right to live in good health and in clean surroundings.

Breast milk is the
safest and most
hygienic way to
feed your baby.
Breastfeed as
long as you can.



For your FREE booklet on Child Care mail this coupon to:

Information Service: UNICEF
7 & 74, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110 003

Name
Address
Age Occupation Number of children

DIARRHOEA

It can be dangerous
— don't take it lightly.



Babies and young children, especially between six months and two years, are susceptible to diarrhoea. Dirty surroundings, poor personal hygiene and lack of safe drinking water are largely to blame.

Diarrhoea is not a single disease. It is a symptom that accompanies intestinal disorders. Diarrhoea causes loss of vital body fluids and salts. The baby passes frequent watery stools which may be foul smelling. The baby may also vomit. The first response to diarrhoea should be immediate replacement of body fluids. This can be done simply and inexpensively, at home. In a glassful of boiled and cooled water, add a pinch of salt. Make sure this mixture is

not saltier than your tears. Then add 2 teaspoons of sugar. The baby may refuse to drink this, but insist on giving this mixture frequently in small quantities. Rice kanji or coconut water can also be given. If you fail to replace the fluids lost in the baby, it can lead to a dangerous situation called 'dehydration'.

Bottle-fed babies have diarrhoea six times more often than breastfed babies. Breastfeed your baby as long as you can — even when the baby has diarrhoea.

Here are some facts that parents must remember:

- Immediately give plenty of liquids to a child with diarrhoea to avoid dehydration.
- Do not stop breastfeeding under any circumstances.
- Continue normal feeding.
- Contact your doctor immediately, if the child's condition does not improve within two days.
- Prolonged diarrhoea can cause death.



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